

Saturday and Sunday, July 26th–27th

Frieda visited. Mary a little better, up in chair but still in ICU. Trying to talk.

Tuesday, July 29th

Ann Papert visited. Seemed better—transferred to floor with special nurses around the clock.

Wednesday, July 30th

Mary's condition deteriorated. Temperature and pulse elevated and had loose cough. Metal canula (plug) in tracheotomy to allow her to talk.

Thursday, July 31st

Back in ICU. Hyper-alimentation tube moved to other side.

Thursday, August 2nd

Tracheotomy tube closed. Oxygen continued.

Sunday, August 3rd

Mary transferred to New General Hospital 2:20 p.m.—all carried out in 20 minutes. Still has fever and quite confused.

Tuesday, August 5th

Chest aspiration 500cc blood-stained fluid removed from left lung. After this Mary showed gradual improvement and by Saturday and Sunday, August 9–10, she began to be less confused.

Wednesday, August 13th

Moved to Room 8219, surgical floor. Large two-bed room with huge window overlooking the building of the new Health Science Centre and the Gatineau Hills behind. Mary making gradual progress, wound healing, coming together, ileostomy draining well. Some problems with electrolytes and one episode with gallbladder drainage. Mary now getting up and using walker to go to toilet but taking things slowly. Delay in bed being procured at Toronto General Hospital. Mary finally transferred by air on evening of September 5. Auntie and Cath drove in van as Mary accompanied by registered nurse.

This excerpt is an account of Mary's illness during the summer of 1980. Tragically, after recovering from these serious health problems, she was subsequently diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in 1995, and died on October 17th, 1998.

Cath McNaughton met Mary 45 years ago at Knightswood Hospital in Glasgow, Scotland. As young women in a first job as Ward Sisters, they became friends and because of their rather fetching veils and uniforms, they decided to have their photographs taken. It was the beginning of a strong partnership in Scotland and in Canada, and it was to last through illnesses, career changes, and even through the painful journey that is Alzheimer's disease. Mary's courage made it possible and to the end she never gave up fighting for control. The saga gives a very limited record of all she suffered. It was written because her friends and family could not understand why she was so critically ill for so long. Mary saw it as a grim fairy tale made endurable because she was loved so much.

MARY O'BRIEN

XXVIII

Pity me
my young love said
turning his dark head
away
to watch the melancholy play
of cloud
against the sky.
Pity you!
my reply:
dearest, ask for all I have
full sweeping radii of love
but I must keep my sympathy
for what I know
you'll do to me.

IV

You look
with entomological cool
and see
that transparency without iridescence
is no more becoming to me
than to moribund moths impaled.

I look
with furry nurtured zeal
and see
that compassion without comprehension
is anathema to you
as to a black panther caged.